

People Scrutiny Commission

13 March 2023

Public Forum – Statements



Statements have been received as listed below (the full content is set out on the subsequent pages):

1. Rachel Green – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services
2. Jen Smith – SEND services
3. Mark Pennington-Field – closure of Fostering Service facilities at Capgrave Crescent and Rodbourne Road



Statement 1 – Rachel Green

Topic – SEND services

I am writing to you today in regards to the SEND services within BCC. The send services as a whole, in my experience and many other parents/carers experience is a complete horror show. My current issue is above and beyond what I've ever experienced and there are many more in a similar situation with regards to EOTAS.

The SEND team and BCC seem to not care about legalities or a child's education when they have to put more work in. As a parent I would get a section 47 for educational neglect if I was to not provide an education to my child but what happens when the LA don't provide one due to their own maladministration? In my experience nothing, nothing happens.

An EOTAS plan was agreed in Oct 2021 and looks great on paper I am still waiting 17 months later for the plan to be in place. Who's getting the section 47? I have been the one paying for educational provisions for my daughter and now I'm being told I can't claim the money back because the evidence is not good enough. Some of which I sent in 10 months ago.

There's no clarity, no understanding, no guidance. I've had to do everything myself from setting up a plan and paying for resources.

Things are always needing to be passed from one person to another. And this causes more delays.

Outcomes of mediation are not met, official complaints make no difference. Finance do not make it clear in the pricing breakdown as to what's included in what payment, they do their own thing and the figures don't even add up. It means some of my daughters resources I can't buy until the end of the school year, it makes no sense and I'm the one chasing it all up because if I don't I'm waiting for someone else to chase it but they seem to not know what's going on either. I drew up a clear plan of costs. Do Finance not see that?

There seems to be a lack of communication between everyone. The managers don't know what the seniors are doing, the seniors don't hear from the managers, the finance department can't calculate, the senior caseworkers don't know how finance work, finance don't communicate and make up their own rules. I'm only now being told things I should have been told 17 months ago. I am blamed for not signing 1 piece of paperwork even though I emailed explaining why and did not get a response. It removes the responsibility from the LA to the parent, that's not what EOTAS is about.

Why can there not be a specific team or a separate finance section that deals only with EOTAS. That way everyone knows what everyone's doing. Why do people not communicate? How can BCC SEND service allow a child to go without an education for a year and a half and still act as if it's ok with no repercussions? Why does no one admit they are wrong? Why is it the parent is blamed, the parent has to get things back on time, yet the ones supposedly helping don't stick to timelines and get away with it. And why does a parent/carer have to fight to get money back when the LA should have been providing it in the first place?

I'm currently owed between £4000-£5000 if that was me owing you, I'd be chased with no leniency what so ever? Children are being failed across Bristol because of the failings within the LA. When will our children mean enough for someone to care?

Kind regards
Rachel Green

Statement 2 – Jen Smith

Topic – SEND services

Bristol City Council has submitted agenda papers which includes Annual Reviews and Tribunal data.

In 2021, I lodged a Sendist EHCP appeal which was heard in 2022. The outcome of that included provision added into Section F.

At the next Annual Review in 2023, some of that provision was removed yet not had not been implemented by the Local Authority.

This is a failure to adhere to s. 42 of the Children and Families Act (“CAFA”) 2014.

This was educational provision to cover time when my child was not in an education setting. So a child not even getting full time education after being off rolled and discriminated against by his former school.

He won't get that education back despite it being his legal right.

I have pushed missing provision to a Stage 2 complaint response from the council. The council's response is to glaze over it. They're not going to provide it.

This now opens up my right to take the complaint to the LGO for the 9 months of EHCP provision missing prior to lodging my latest Sendist appeal.

This is education theft by Bristol City Council. It is a choice by the council to break the law and behave in this way. The fact is the council doesn't care or I wouldn't be saying the same things year in year out.

This appeal could have been avoided by coming to a personal budget arrangement with the missing provision as I requested. Especially because it was a partial Education Other Than At School Plan.

But no. The council's choice is to head down the more expensive and time consuming route of Sendist. It benefits them to do this though. Time spent in legal argument is time they do not have to pay for education provision for disabled children.

Between 2020 and the next Sendist hearing in January 2024, I will have been to Sendist 6 times.

This will have been for four EHCP tribunals and two disability discrimination tribunals.

All of these tribunals post-date Ofsted's original 2019 joint Send inspection, so the assertion that parents more recently are having a better experience is poppycock.

Papers for today's meeting regarding Sendist appeals say: 'This increase is partly a reflection of the volume of work/ appealable decisions being made by the assessment (EHCNA) and review (annual review) teams within the SEND team.'

That's basically water colouring over Bristol City Council consistently and deliberately choosing to break laws they are responsible for upholding.

This paragraph is particularly shocking: 'A high number of appeals are lodged because parents are not happy with the school that the LA have named often because they are seeking placement at an Independent Non-Maintained School, while the LA deemed the child's needs could be met more locally. Other reasons for part I appeals are that parents are seeking a special school place and a mainstream school was named on the EHCP, or parents could be seeking an alternative special school placement within or outside Bristol.'

Families aren't making an Amazon Wish List. They are desperately trying to find a school that will educate not traumatise their children.

I can also – from personal experience – say that the 'other' reasons for part I appeals are not parents seeking a special school place over a mainstream school.

They are children whose complex needs cannot be met in mainstream or are pushed out of mainstream education who need to be educated somewhere else.

Papers to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board for the 14 February 2023 state: '...there have been some issues with secondary mainstream schools not wanting to open resource bases as this will have an impact on their results. This has been a barrier and we are opting to work with special schools to mitigate this. We need a substantial number of secondary specialist places created in phase 2 to meet the needs of the city. We are on target to exceed 450 specialist provision places by 2024.'

The People Directorate know full well that some mainstream secondaries do not want Send pupils in their schools. And yet, somehow make this a parental choice problem when it comes to scrutiny.

STATEMENT 3

BFCA Bristol Foster Carers Association

Appeal to stop the closure of Capgrave Crescent and Rodbourne Road.

We would like to draw your attention to the article that was published in the Bristol Evening Post on February 1st, 2023, reporting that Bristol City Council will be closing the facilities for the Fostering Service at Capgrave Crescent and Rodbourne Road. The article goes on to state, in a tweet sent out by you, that the justification for the closure was that they were 'disused' and 'derelict'.

With respect neither hub is 'derelict' or 'disused', in fact the demand is greater than the facilities can supply!

A vast number of Foster Carers and associated community members have approached our Association expressing concern at the decision and have asked us as a Foster Carer led local charity to collectively support them in opposing this decision.

In previous press it has been reported that Bristol's Foster Carers are some of the city's 'VIP's' and yet the reported ill-informed decision to close these valued community hubs doesn't seem very 'VIP' friendly! or respectful of their role as there has been no consultation with these "VIPs".

Out of respect to you instead of responding to press overtures for a response to the reported closures, we are writing to appeal to you to reverse the decision.

As Bristol residents we recognise the ongoing need to make cuts and savings but question the decision to close the above hubs. All councillors and the Mayor, are corporate parents for the children we support, and we are surprised as well as concerned by the decision that this body is taking.

The closures will have a huge impact on the fostering community and the children in their care. The Bristol Fostering community is already struggling due to a shortage of carers, greater demands on foster carers already stretched in their roles, increased volume of children coming into care and a noted increase in the poor mental health of these children having experienced extreme trauma and abuse as well as the residual aftereffects on their well-being as a consequence of the pandemic lockdowns.

Capgrave Crescent houses approximately 30 staff as their working base. Capgrave is also a community-based resource for both foster carers and the children in their care. Capgrave Crescent utilises the space to offer a Children's Therapeutic Hub and family contact centre. Capgrave Crescent provides therapy rooms for children, places of safety and security whilst undergoing intensive behaviour and psychological support, and a large working kitchen where both carers and children have been able to gain essential life skills. The garden to Capgrave has been used for outdoor events, support groups and on occasion allowed use as a safe outside space for some children who do not have access to a safe secure garden.

Rodbourne Rd is another community-based hub that allows Bristol City Council employees a space to work, offers safe and secure family contact sessions, and holds regular fostering support groups such as Ethnic Minority Children Foster Carers support group, and Foster Care wellbeing sessions.

For many of these children the safe space provided by both these community-based hubs is vital. The children recognise them as a safe, familiar and secure setting. Both locations offer a range of services to meet the increased complex needs presented by Bristol's children in care.

Where do you propose the above facilities will be, or where activities and safe therapy provision will be offered following closure?

We would welcome a swift reversal or pause on the decision to close these facilities and for a meaningful consultation to take with Foster Carers and Adoptee parents who can in person articulate their concerns.

Mark Pennington-Field
(Chair of BFCA) & Foster Carers and Children of Bristol City Council
Fostering.

Quotes from Carers and their Children:

Both Capgrave & Rodbourne have served me well as ALL my training has taken place within their informal and comfortable setting. It cannot be underestimated how the spaces are more conducive to even the least confident carers being able to engage and join in. As contact centres I know my YPs have greatly benefitted from the home from home familiarity and difficult interactions with parents have been eased with the ability to make a breakfast or lunch and access the board games or even internet to log on to phones etc. In the lifetime of work needed for some of our children to repair

and heal these exclusive venues for their use are an integral part of some their first steps to recovering and staking their claims to a childhood. They cannot be lost. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

After being a part of the children's therapeutic hub team twice now I can wholeheartedly say that the closure of Capgrave Crescent would be a great loss.

We have and continue to use this space multiple times a week and it provides carers with a space to go to meet with others on the programme and discuss some really sensitive situations. With Capgrave crescent, it is a safe space to discuss some very confidential information and would not work the same if we were to not have this space.

For my young person, she uses the space weekly also. For skills building using the kitchen and for play therapy session which have actually been crucial to our placement stability.

We personally feel closing Capgrave would be a massive loss to the whole team and to the development and nature of the children in our care. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

Capgrave have helped us as a family in many ways from training sessions to helping my boy with anger management sessions during the summer holidays which he found very useful. so to lose this facility would be a crying shame why shut local facilities which our children can access easily & safely. Shame on you MARVIN. 🙄👎 **(XX, Foster Carer)**

Capgrave is a place where our YP feel safe when they are there having family time, where they can play games with there family, also the people who work there are always a phone call away when we need specialist help to calm down situations out of our control we need this place and Rodbourne road **(XX, Foster Carer)**

It is detrimental that you think twice about closing Radbourne Road and Capgrave Crescent.

Closing these Facilities, I believe, will have a significant negative impact on foster parents and our looked after children in care.

At Capgrave Crescent, I received assistance and training in specialised therapeutic practises.

This facility has been used by many of my children; it is a safe, comfortable place that seems like a home away from home.

They have had access to amenities such as the kitchen, allowing them to express themselves while remaining comfortable away from the spotlight.

I believe that losing our vital community hubs/centres will be detrimental to our already overcrowded spaces and resources.

"Everyone requires a place to live, but it is a supporting family hub that creates a support network to help keep kids stay in a safe and happy home" **(XX, Foster Carer)**

Capgrave was our first experience of fostering. Where we had our first training sessions to where we met every week for support.

It's the place my YP stills goes every week to receive vital emotional support she needs in the safe environment she knows so well five years after she moved in.

It's the place I still go every week to get the support I need to help my YP manage her emotions.

It's the place I call when I need answers to questions I don't know.

It's a place I've been to to just use the garden space for training as the building was full.

It's where we've held garden parties for our YP during the summer.

It's the first place i thought of when I needed help with my YP last year. They quickly found time and space for me and my YP.

In the five years I've been a foster carer I have spent 3.5 of those years having weekly meetings at Capgrave.

Even when we weren't regular visitors there my YP would always talk about it and point it out as we passed it on occasion.

Every YP we look after needs this place. It's a constant safe space our YP look for. The work they do there can't be done just anywhere. It's somewhere our YP walk into and feel safe straight away. They can make a drink and a snack when they want. They can play games or sit and talk. They can be them selves. Something they can't do just anywhere. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

Felt like Capgrave was my 2nd home at times, as I was there quite a lot, the support they gave me and my yp was greatly appreciated, a welcoming place that would be greatly missed (XX, Foster Carer)

My wife and I are experienced foster carers of 17 years. Our current foster child has significant behavioural challenges due to early childhood trauma. It is without doubt that our placement would have broken down without the support of Capgrave, and a young girl that still has a chance to prosper and make a positive contribution to society would be consigned to a life of residential homes and statutory minimum care, passed from provider to provider with 28 days notice as they sell off properties to maximise profit, subject to short term and variable relationships with a cast of a hundred underpaid and overworked carers, all this thrust on top of an early life of uncertainty and instability.

Contrast this with the warm, normal supportive family life she has in foster care that gives us half a chance of producing a warm normal adult that will make a positive contribution to society.

It is not buildings such as Capgrave that should be described as abandoned but it is the children that currently rely on them that will be abandoned if they are no longer available.

Bristol city council should be proudly celebrating and investing in Capgrave, not looking for shameful short term profit that does not serve the long term needs of the community. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

I've been a foster carer for Bristol City Council for 6 years and have used both Capgrave and Rodbourne Road throughout that time. I'm absolutely stunned that the very people who purport to have the best interests of children in care and foster carers in Bristol at heart feel it's acceptable to consider removing 2 properties in the City that are so valuable to us and integral to our role in supporting traumatised children and each other. Rather ironically, one training session I attended at Capgrave was "Secure Base", a model that helps carers support deeply traumatised children to heal through availability, sensitivity, acceptance, co-operation and family membership. Within Capgrave all 5 of these caregiving qualities are incorporated into the building and the team that work there, enabling our children to be the best version of themselves despite early life trauma and neglect. As the Bristol Children's Charter states, children in Bristol have a right to "thrive and feel safe" does that not extend to our children in care? Capgrave provides a safe space for us and our children who need consistency and security in their lives to help reduce their high anxiety levels, allowing them to express their emotions and cope better with life. If it wasn't for Capgrave and the results of their work, I wouldn't be writing this now as I'd have given up fostering. They held us together as a family when we were falling apart. Capgrave isn't just bricks and mortar to us, it's a place where we are always welcomed, can go to on our darkest of days, we can laugh and celebrate our achievements and we can cry and comfort each other in the house that has become like a home to many of us and our children. The outdoor space is a valuable asset and provides a calming environment for highly anxious children and we've been able to have BBQs there, enjoying each others company and bringing us all together. Birth children too massively benefit from the home feel of Capgrave attending support sessions cooking and eating together in the kitchen and bush craft activities in the garden. If we lose Capgrave I just hope we can easily access the alternatives and they don't fall within the Clean Air Zone or relocate to soulless buildings. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

I have currently been a foster parent for 10 years , and Capgrave has been a vital part in this. Offering some of my young people various skill and confidence groups. And previous when I was going through a really tough time I had fantastic support, to help see through it and to get help to use new tools. They helped save my sanity and in keeping the young person with me. They offer Great courses I've just finished the Bristol module which even after 10 years I found very educational. Capgrave offers a safe friendly space for our children also us. I personally feel it would be very detrimental to lots of Bristol families if Capgrave would close.

I had met with Marvin and he said our children come first, and it is a vital job we do. If this is the case don't cut children services and invest in our future. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

I have been a Foster parent for nearly 7 years. With a sibling group of 3 that have all received vital help and refuge from capgrave. We attended weekly for years, have daily check-ins and individual mentors. We have Laughed, cried and over come so many difficult times due to the support received from the team at capgrave. The children feel safe there. The adults feel they can breath while there there an there's always someone who understands what you go through as a carer. The closure of this safe, inviting friendly place would change alot of young people's lives an those of the carers. Those who still attend or those who know they can attend if they need. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

Dereliction, the shameful failure to fulfil one's obligations.

It's not just buildings that can be derelict.

A decision has been made based solely on where can we get money now , once again the most vulnerable in society are the easy target .

Why do we need capgrave ? Because interventions that should have been in place earlier in our childrens lives were not available , we have reached crises point .

I would not be fostering now had it not been for the support , training and therapy that the Capgrave hub have given .

Capgrave should be held up as an example of how to support traumatised children and their carers and the service that they provide should be shared and expanded across the country.

*They should not be pushed aside and abandoned . Capgrave makes a massive positive contribution to society, it changes lives , it gives hope for a better future. **(XX, Foster Carer)***

Capgrave serves south Bristol

Rodbourne serves north Bristol

*This is important as children do not have to travel through the centre of town in traffic for however long it takes to go to family time/therapy as this can make children more anxious 😞 does effect how they engage after. **(XX, Foster Carer)***

*I have used capgrave for training I can't drive so it was close to me I have taken three girls I had there it's a very calming place for the children especially when they have anxieties **(XX, Foster Carer)***

I have been a Foster carer for 25years and have attended lots of training at Capgrave and many children in my care have used the services at Capgrave, it provides a 'homely feel' with kitchen facilities for cooking/arts&crafts and a nice garden with play equipment which suits some children better than being inside. Our children have experienced so much trauma in their lives and receive care and support from various professionals and I feel this has been achievable also due to the lovely setting Capgrave provides 'homely feel' the children feel safe and this is the right side of town.

As a busy Foster carer and my child attending school and many different clubs in the evenings it would not be feasible to get across to other areas within Bristol. Please put the children first and realise Capgrave is a must for children and Foster carers and is used and effective! **(XX, Foster Carer)**

Using Capgrave as a base for my young person to receive therapeutic support has been (and still is) a fantastic resource.

It offers a safe and homely environment for not only her, but for numerous other young people who need a space where they can express themselves freely without feeling they are just another person in just another grey office building with lots of other people that they don't know wandering around. Capgrave is a place that 'fits' into the local community as it is just 'a house' and doesn't stand out as being anything different, which is exactly what is needed and wanted by the young people using this space.

My young person often chooses to use Capgrave as a 'safe place' to have her family time meet ups with her mum as she can remove herself to another room or to the garden if things get a little too overwhelming for her.

To lose Capgrave would be awful and I believe there will be a detrimental impact on those young people (and carers alike) who have treated this space as a 'home from home' - somewhere to be able to gain some semblance of control and 'normality' into what can otherwise be considered a very dysregulated existence for many. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

I have been a foster carer for over 10 years .

Rodbourne rd is local to us .We have used this building on numerous occasions.

We have done training courses there .Attended North Bristol support group there .Now the knit and natter is being held there .Great for well being of carers ,and the skills learnt there can be passed onto the children too .

It has also provided a cozy safe environment for foster children to have family time .

To close Rodbourne and Capgrave would be a travesty.

It would also be false economy as the bcc would only have to pay for venues for these events to take place in .

Most of the family time can not be out in the community ,for various reasons .This is why it is so important to keep these welcoming spaces for everyone .

Do not let the children suffer once again by losing these valuable comfort spaces . **(XX, Foster Carer)**

Capgrave - We have been foster carers for only a few years so have not used these facilities a huge amount as yet however my own children have accessed Capgrave during the school holidays as children of foster carers and have really loved and enjoyed the sessions offered there.. My older 2 children have suffered with separation anxiety since covid and have found it very hard to be in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people, so I was

admittedly nervous about taking them to these sessions and leaving them there without me, after an initial upset both of them settled into their first session there and really enjoyed it and return visits, this has helped both of them gain more confidence and be able to do new things without needing me there so in essence be "normal" children again. Capgrave and it's staff made that happen and gave my children back some of their old confidence. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

All of our young persons have been effected by attachment issues and will suffer with AD (Attachment Disorder).

My YP aged 12 has had 6 different carers, 7 different Social workers and numerous support staff over his time in foster care.

The one consistency has been Capgrove. It's like a home, it's a familiar place where he feels safe, where he can meet these workers and have a familiar base.

Put yourself in the child's mind, already removed from your home and everything that is familiar to them. Put an ever changing network of adults imputing into your life, then in unfamiliar, unfriendly and hectic environments and think how you will feel. Do you think you can thrive in that environment?

Treatment for AD

1. Encouraging the child's development by being nurturing, responsive and caring.
2. Providing consistent caregivers to encourage a stable attachment for the child.
3. Providing a positive, stimulating and interactive environment for the child.
4. Addressing the child's medical, safety and housing needs, as appropriate.

If you remove Capgrove you will be pulling the rug out from under our Young Peoples feet. It may be a short term solution to the Councils financial problems but has such long term negative implications.

Do your research into what our looked after children need. Ask those that look after them. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

We have been fostering for BCC for 17 years and have used Capgrave constantly, the children we have taken there have all benefitted, they view the house as a safe place as it is homely , the sort of therapeutic support it offers cannot be done in an office . At the moment we are there every week supporting a young person with complexed needs, without this support this placement would have broken down a long time ago and the young person would probably have ended up in a more secure unit , which would

probably ruin their future, and also cost the council considerably more . We have also taken suicidal teenagers there who have needed and received a massive amount of support to change their lives and help them through extremely difficult times in their lives , one of these young people now has children of thier own which is a testament to the hard work of the staff at Capgrave. This goes to show that Capgrave not only changes lives but also saves lives , not bad for a derelict building 🙄. **(XX, Foster Carer)**

Both my boys use Capgrave as they need a safe place for family time and play therapy. We have lots of meetings there **(XX, Foster Carer)**

We Fostercarer's and our children need places like Capgrave and Rodbourne !!

These houses are used very often by Fostercarer's crying out for help , reassurance and guidance when things become difficult and in my Experience with my children they very quickly felt comfortable which helped them to relax in a way that seemed less formal

In a office setting I believes a lot of children and definitely my child would be hyper vigilant causing anxiety and less able to engage

My child have fond memories every time we drive past Capgrave and ask when she can go back !! The closure of these houses will be devastating among us Fostercarer's **(XX, Foster Carer)**

I've been thinking how Capgrave closure will impact us being out of area

I am unable fully to argue this point because I'm unaware of other facilities and their whereabouts.

But wanted to say we travel weekly leaving at 3pm just before school closes and do not get home until 8pm because of logistics

If we had to travel further I would be hesitant to use the valuable therapeutic support because this journey is tiring and can be stressful especially after the session because my yp is especially vulnerable then and because the traffic can be slow or busy either way which lengthens our journey

Traumatised brains need consistency, to feel safe and secure, they cope better with a rigid timetable of predictability this means staff, surroundings, and expertise.

Capgrave offers the valuable facility of having an outside space. Being in nature has a therapeutic value of helping to calm down a disregulated brain living in survival mode as many foster children do on a daily basis

Drink and food can also calm the brain which lives in the red hostile domain as does the distraction of being able to cook, make a drink or indeed play, which is highly important in repairing developmental trauma

Capgrove offers all of this because it reflects a home, it does not have the appearance of an office or establishment where difficult conversations, meetings, decisions may have been had and stored within the trauma. Absolutely important within their trauma.

On top of this Capgrave offers valuable resources, training, support by highly skilled professionals doing a critical job to avoid our yp, being placed in children's homes at such a high cost to the service provider
Our role is one of the most stressful and important jobs on this earth, to love, protect and to turn out loving human beings that can go on and have responsible, respectful relationships that would not happen without us and the wonderful work at Capgrove and other departments that support us and not the yp **(XX, Foster Carer)**

As a new carer looking after a young person with difficult behaviour I received amazing support and other new carers will not be able to receive any of it. **(XX, Foster Carer)**